Is it safe to download screen savers?
September 15th, 2009, 6:00 pm · Post a Comment · posted by Ed Schwartz, NOCCC

*Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org. And don't forget to stop by the Gadgetress' home for the PC Club, at ocregister.com/link/pcclub, to find out how to ask a question and read past answers.*

QUESTION: I recently traded out my older PC with a newer one from my daughter who went off to college. I have tried numerous times to add a screen saver, but to no avail. Do you know of any sure fire screen savers that I could easily download without having to worry too much about cookies or malware? Any help is certainly appreciated.

PC CLUB: Let's tackle your screen saver question first. Downloading screen savers is one of the most frequent ways users infect their PCs. It is very easy for an unscrupulous person to embed malware in a screen saver.

I know that the screen savers that are included with Windows can be boring but at least they're safe. To add one of the built in screen savers using Windows XP, right-click the Desktop and select Properties. Next, select the Screen Saver tab at the top. By clicking the drop-down box in the middle of the window labeled "Screen saver" you can select from the list of available screen savers.

You can also adjust the wait time and other settings using this window. Just as a reminder to those who still believe that you need a screen saver to protect your screen, it's a myth that is just not true with today's technology. For Vista, right-click the Desktop and select Personalize. Click Screen Saver, 3rd from the top.

If you obtain a screen saver not already built into Windows, it most likely will come in the form of an installation program which will place SCR's or screen saver files in the appropriate location depending on your version of Windows.

My advice is to stay away from any web site that offers free screen savers. You are just inviting bad stuff into your PC.

Also, if your PC is already running a bit slow, screen savers are the last thing you need. Some screen savers are fairly memory intense, which means that they use up valuable system resources.

A safe way to create a screen saver of your own pictures is to place the pictures that you want included into your My Pictures folder or Pictures folder with Vista. Microsoft offers step-by-step instructions at its "Create a personal screen saver using your photos" page (link: http://bit.ly/1utgkX). The only screen savers that I've installed are those that I obtained from a reputable source such as a museum or historic site gift shop. *~Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his blog at www.edwardns.com/blog.*